

The A.D

by Brandon

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Summary: The Assistant Director visits a pauper's grave.

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>SUMMARY: The Assistant Director visits a pauper's grave<p>The
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The chauffeur was puzzled. He had driven for the Assistant Director for five years now, and for the previous incumbent for three years before that. He was therefore used to being called to duty at all hours of the day and night; he was also used to ferrying his charge to meetings in odd, out-of-the-way places. But being called on a Saturday afternoon to take the A.D. to a pauper's cemetery in a driving rainstorm -- that was downright weird.

He glanced briefly in the rearview mirror as he powered the big limo around a corner. The A.D. was sitting quietly in back, seemingly staring out the side window at the passing scenery -- but the chauffeur knew from long experience that whatever the A.D. was looking at, it wasn't train-swept Washington.

At length he eased the car to a stop in front of a small, run-down cemetery. A black, wrought-iron fence, waist high, ran the length of the block. Long grass and weeds grew up along the fence line; a cracked and tired-looking sidewalk led up to a rusty gate.

The chauffeur started to get out of the car, but the A.D.'s voice stopped him: "You can wait in the car. I won't be long." The chauffeur glanced again in the rearview, and for a moment the A.D. caught his eye. They both knew it was a violation of the new anti-terrorism regulations for the A.D. to travel anywhere unescorted; they also both knew that it was far from the first time they had broken that particular rule.

The right rear passenger door clicked open, the sound of rain thrumming on the sidewalk suddenly becoming noticeably louder. The A.D. stepped out onto the pavement and hastily slammed the door again. The chauffeur settled down to wait.

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She walked slowly up to the gate in the wrought-iron fence. Rain continued to pour down out of sullen skies, and in moments the Assistant Director was soaked to the skin. The gate swung open with a creak and a groan of protest, and she stepped through it and into the small, ill-kept cemetery.

For a moment, she thought she was alone. It was a small, cramped lot, with an abandoned building, apparently formerly a rooming house, on one side, and a shabby, dejected-looking church on the other. Stretching out across the lot itself in neat rows were the headstones, a few shiny, white and new, most worn and pitted with age and neglect. Here and there, someone had planted flowers, but most of the graves looked as if they hadn't seen a visitor in decades. Nothing moved.

The Assistant Director peered through the rain and general gloom. In the far corner was a mound of earth, partially covered by a tarpaulin, rising next to an open grave. She advanced a few steps towards the grave, then suddenly stopped. There was someone standing next to the grave. After a moment, she realized who it must be, and closed the remaining distance.

"Mrs. Mulder," she said.

The figure turned towards her. Tired eyes flicked from the Assistant Director's face to the waiting limo and back again. Finally, she spoke. "Dana Scully. It has been a long time." Again, she glanced briefly at the limo. "I didn't expect...." Her voice trailed off.

The Assistant Director tried to think of something to say, but everything that crossed her mind seemed ridiculously inadequate. Finally, she could only say, "I'm sorry." She hesitated a moment, and then nodded awkwardly towards the open grave. "Is he...is he...here?"

The other woman nodded. "Yes." Bitterly: "They dug his grave and put him in it; then the rain started and they left. I suppose they'll be back tomorrow, when the weather's fair."

The Assistant Director winced inwardly, as she heard the echo: "Fair weather friend." Angry, she shook her head. There was nothing I could do, >> she insisted to herself. Nothing. Lord knows, I tried. >>

Mrs. Mulder took a step closer, and laid a hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry, Dana. You didn't deserve that. I know you did everything you could. Fox was....was headstrong. Willful. Even as a boy, we could never control him. I sometimes think he must have had some...some urge towards self-destruction." She turned and walked back towards the grave. "I suppose I should move him, now that I've found him. I suppose that eventually I shall. But for now...I just can't. He has been so troubled; he deserves to rest. My boy," she murmured. "My poor boy."

The Assistant Director moved up to stand next to the other woman, and looked down into the grave. Resting there in the mud, water pooling around it from the steady downpour, was a cheap wooden casket. Standing there, staring at it, she felt a sudden rush of memories:

Was it really only five years ago? Has it really been only five years since we were together? Only five years since we crisscrossed the country, seeking the strange, the unnatural, the unexplainable? Only half a decade since that final day, when I came to your apartment to tell you they'd offered me Skinner's job?

Oh, you supported me. You urged me to take it. You told me I had to think of my career, and pointed out what we both knew from the start: That our partnership couldn't last forever, and that if it had to end, this was a better reason than most. You said you would carry on, that your efforts would be bolstered by having an ally in management. You said... you said.... you said....

And so I took the job, and then came that terrible day, only a few weeks later, when I arrived at work to find your resignation letters sitting on my desk. I tried to call you. I wanted you to reconsider. I wanted to tell you how valuable you were to the Bureau, and how desperately we needed people like you, who were independent, and willing to take risks. I wanted to remind you of the essential balance the two of us created. I wanted to tell you that... that my life wouldn't be the same without you in it. So many things I wanted to say. But the phone just rang and rang, and you didn't answer. And the next day, it had been disconnected.

I looked for you, Mulder. I looked everywhere I could think. I even enlisted those three oddballs on your behalf, but even they couldn't find you. Even Frohike finally gave up. And slowly, we drifted apart as well. You were the glue that held us together. Eventually, even I stopped looking. But I never stopped thinking about you.

Then this morning the phone rang. A routine identity check of John Doe #27 had revealed him to be a former member of the Bureau. The man on the phone asked me if we wanted to assert jurisdiction, since you were once one of ours. He was polite, respectful and entirely correct... but I could tell from his tone of voice that he was just going through the motions. After all, what interest could the Bureau have in one more homeless alcoholic, found dead in an alley, apparently of natural causes? And of course, I had to say that we had no interest.

But I couldn't stay away. In the back of my mind, there remains that last, lingering doubt. How many times, when we worked together, did your persistence and dogged determination prove in the end that an apparently natural death was not natural at all? How many times was I forced to admit that the world was a larger, stranger -- and more wonderful -- place than I had believed? That there are, after all, more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in my philosophy.

I could do it. I could take action, even now. I could call the authorities, and tell them that I want to exert our jurisdiction after all. I could have the body shipped to Quantico, and I could pick up the tools I haven't touched in half a decade, and perform the

autopsymyself. The findings would be inconclusive, and some data would be lost, since the body has already been embalmed. But I could do it. I could. In the old days, when we were together, you would have insisted on it, and the odds are better than fifty-fifty that you would have been right.

And yet, I cannot have the heart. I look at the worn, haggard face of the woman standing next to me, and I realize that I cannot be so inhumane as to put her through that -- it might destroy her. She has lost her daughter. She has lost her husband, first through estrangement and then in the final parting of ways which we all must face. And now she has lost her son. I cannot -- I will not -- endanger what peace she is able to find for herself by disturbing your remains.

And so I am here. I am not here as your former partner. I am not here as a government official carrying out a routine, if onerous, duty. I am not even here as a scientist, trying to further the extent of human knowledge. I am here as a woman, a woman in sorrow because she has lost someone very dear to her. I am here to say goodbye to a friend. I hope that you can accept that. I hope that you can forgive me that I don't have the strength to press the issue. You were always the engine, driving us forward. That was never my idiom.

Oh, Mulder. There is so much I wish I could have said to you. There are so many things I didn't understand when we were together, which now seem so very clear. Most of all, I wish I could have found the words to tell you that I understand you -- that I have always understood you, and what you were trying to accomplish. Even as I was heaping doubt and skepticism on your ideas, I recognized their value. I am a scientist, and as a scientist, I know that questions must be asked, or there will never be any answers. Without the Galileos, stubbornly insisting that the Earth DOES move, there can be no progress.

I never succeeded in making that clear -- that the truth IS out there, and that we both were seeking it, just by different means. That is the biggest failure of my life. I failed you, Mulder. I hope that you can forgive me. I don't think that I can ever forgive myself.>>

"Dana? Are you all right?"

Scully looked around, and saw that Mrs. Mulder's eyes were on her, warm and gentle with concern. Suppressing her own emotions, Scully forced a smile onto her face. "Yes. I'm fine. I'll be fine," she repeated, speaking to herself as much as to the other woman.

"Fox always spoke very highly of you," Mrs. Mulder said.
"Before...before..."

Scully nodded. "I understand. I thought well of him, too." Inwardly she raged at the awkward formality of her words. Why can I never think of the right thing to say?>> she thought angrily. I always sound like such a cold fish. Why can I never manage to express my true emotions?>>

Yet the other woman seemed to understand, for again she laid her hand on Scully's shoulder. "It's all right, Dana. It will be all right. Fox was a hard man to know, a hard man to care for. We both did the

best we could, but in the end, he was too strong for both of us. There is no shame in that. And now all that's left is for us to grieve."

There seemed to be nothing left to say. Scully and Mrs. Mulder stood in the cemetery in the rain, looking at each other wordlessly, as still and silent as the abandoned monuments to the dead which stood all around them. Finally, Scully stirred, and looked at her watch. "I have to go," she said, hating herself again for her awkwardness. She turned once more to the open grave, and looked down into it at the casket. It's really just a box,>> she thought. And inside of it is a human cadaver, no different from the hundreds of others I've dissected in my career. There's really nothing there at all of the man I knew.>>

Finally, she turned away from the grave, and walked back towards the car. As she reached the ancient, rusty gate, Mrs. Mulder spoke for the last time.

"Dana?"

Scully turned to face her once again.

"Would you...would you like to have coffee together sometime? We could...reminisce." She smiled slightly. "Call it a wake for teetotalers."

Scully paused. Her instinct was to refuse, to flee from this uninvited human contact. The only way to protect yourself is to avoid contact.>> She opened her mouth to decline, and said, "Yes. I'd like that very much."

She turned and walked out of the cemetery. Her driver started to get out of the car to hold the door for her, but she waved him back. No point in both of them being soaked. She opened the door and slid into her seat, heedless of the streams of water now running off onto the upholstery. She pulled the door shut, and for a moment she sagged back into the cushions. Then she opened her eyes again, to see the driver staring at her in the rearview mirror.

"Destination, ma'am?" he asked quietly.

She paused for a long moment. Where did she want to go? Lord knew there was plenty of paperwork sitting on her desk, demanding attention -- and on a rainy Saturday afternoon, she wouldn't have to cope with the damned phone constantly ringing, people demanding "just a few minutes while I run this by you", appointments, meetings, on and on, seemingly without end. The idea was enticing; it would allow her to regain her equilibrium, and lay back to rest some of the ghosts which had been disturbed this afternoon.

Except to hell with it. Monday would come soon enough, and she would have to climb back down into the trenches, like it or not. Today, and tonight, belonged to her. To her and Mulder.

"Take me home," she said.

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